

SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Schools are basically safe places. Despite several high-profile school shootings in the late 1990s, school violence has actually decreased over the past decade. According to the 2000 Annual Report on School Safety, the overall school crime rate dropped from 144 per 100,000 in 1992 to 101 per 100,000 in 1998.¹

Students are more than twice as likely to experience serious violent crime while out of school than while in school. Regardless of its frequency, the presence of violent crime at school creates a climate of fear among students, staff, and teachers.¹ Although violence outside of schools is more serious, school violence distracts teachers from educating students, affects students' ability to concentrate, and places everyone involved at great psychological and economic risk.

Much school violence can be attributed to one or more of the following:

- Gang influence and activities
- Possession of firearms by youth
- Alcohol and drug use by youth

Statistics

- Between 1994 and 1999, 220 events resulting in 253 deaths were identified; 202 events involved 1 death and 18 involved multiple deaths. Of the 220 events, 172 were homicides, 30 were suicides, 11 were homicide-suicides, 5 were legal intervention deaths, and 2 were unintentional firearm-related deaths.²
- In 1998, 43 out of every 1,000 students were victims of nonfatal violent crimes while at school or going to and from school. While away from school, 48 out of every 1,000 of these students were the victims of nonfatal violent crimes.¹
- In 1999, a smaller percentage of students ages 12 through 18 reported being victims of nonfatal crimes (including theft or violent crimes) at school during the previous 6 months than in 1995 (10 percent and 8 percent, respectively).³
- In 1996-1997, 10 percent of all public schools reported at least one serious violent crime to police.⁴
- According to the 2000 Annual Report on School Safety, each year from 1994 to 1998, 31 out of every 1,000 teachers were victims of violent crimes.¹

Risk Factors

- In 1998, students in urban schools were more likely to be victims of violence at school than their peers in suburban and rural schools. The victimization rates were

117 per 1,000 students in urban schools, 97 per 1,000 students in suburban schools, and 93 per 1,000 students in rural schools.¹

- Students in high school were more vulnerable to crime and crime of a more serious nature.¹
- Students in large schools experienced a higher crime rate than those in smaller schools.³

Students' Reports of Violence

- In 1999, 8 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property during the past 12 months.³
- According to the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 7.7 percent of students were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property one or more times in the past 12 months. In addition, 14.2 percent of students had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the past 12 months. Male, Hispanic, and African-American students were more likely than females or white students to have been in a physical fight. Male students were also more likely than female students to have been threatened or attacked.⁵
- Between 1995 and 1999, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools decreased. In 1995, 29 percent of students reported street gangs being present in their schools. By 1999, this percentage had fallen to 17 percent.³
- At the middle and high school levels, physical attack or a fight without a weapon was the most commonly reported crime in 1996-1997.⁴

Students' Reports of Safety

The decline in the overall school crime rate has been reflected in student reports of school safety.

- Between 1995 and 1999, the percentages of students feeling unsafe while at school or while they were going to and from school decreased from 9 percent to 6 percent.¹
- Overall, Hispanic and African American students were significantly more likely than white students to feel unsafe.¹
- Between 1995 and 1999, there was a decline in the percentage of all students who reported avoiding places at school, citing safety concerns.¹
- According to the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 5.2 percent of students reported missing at least one day of school during the 30 days preceding the survey because they felt unsafe at school or traveling to or from school.⁵

According to an annual survey conducted among 16- to 18-year-old students with an A or B average⁶:

- Nearly two out of three (63 percent) students report incidents of violence at school.
- Fourteen percent said that gang fights have occurred at their school and 12 percent said that a rape or sexual assault has occurred at their school.

- Nearly half (46 percent) say they know someone whom they suspect is capable of or near the point of committing violence against a fellow student, teacher, or administrator. One-fourth say that a student has attacked a teacher at their school.
- One in four students has felt personally endangered by violence at school.

Weapon Carrying

Guns are often carried by children who do not feel safe in their schools and neighborhoods.⁷ Students residing in central cities, public school students, and African-American students were more likely to report knowing a student who brought a gun to school or to report seeing a student with a gun at school.⁸ Between 1993 and 1999, the percentage of students in grades 9 to 12 who reported carrying a weapon to school at least 1 day within the previous 30 days decreased from 12 percent to 7 percent.¹

- During the 1997-1998 school year, schools reported that an estimated 3,927 students were expelled for firearm possession at school in the 50 States and the District of Columbia.⁹
- According to “Weapons and Violence,” a study of high school youths, students reported being able to obtain firearms easily from family and friends. The reasons for carrying guns included the need for protection and to gain respect from peers.¹⁰

In 1999, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey offered the following facts about weapon carrying among youth:

- Nearly 20 percent of the students surveyed reported carrying a weapon during the 30 days preceding the survey.
- Male students (28.6 percent) were more likely than female students (6 percent) to have carried a weapon.
- Hispanic and African-American female students (8.4 percent and 11.7 percent, respectively) were more likely to have carried a gun than white female students (3.6 percent).

The Link Between Violence and Drugs

The use of drugs and alcohol is a major concern for educators because both are connected with school violence. Drug use impairs an individual’s judgment, reaction time, and inhibitions, often leading to violent incidents. Drug sales and related activities in and around schools are also connected to violence.¹¹

- According to the 2000 Indicators of School Crime and Safety, in 1997, 6 percent of students had at least one drink of alcohol during the past 30 days. Seven percent had used marijuana on school property one or more times during the past 30 days.⁴
- In another survey, sixty-one percent of high school students who responded said that drugs were used, kept, or sold at their school.¹²
- Student reports of drug availability, gang presence, and gun presence at school were all related to student reports of having experienced violent victimization at school.⁸

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